

Hand Hygiene and Handwashing

What is Hand Hygiene?

Hand hygiene refers to the use of handwashing or to the use of alcohol-based hand rubs in order to stop outbreaks of communicable diseases.

How to wash hands with soap and water?

Soap and running water remove dirt and grease from hands. It is the method of hand hygiene that should always be used when the hands are visibly soiled with dirt.

- Turn on water tap and let the water run until it becomes warm.
- You may use bar or liquid soap.
- Moisten hands and apply soap. Rub hands together in order to work up a lather. Cover and rub all surfaces of the hands. Lather and rub for at least 10 seconds. Rinse hands thoroughly.
- Dry hands with a clean paper towel or air dryer. Dispose of towel in a waste receptacle.

How to use alcohol-based hand rubs?

Alcohol-based hand sanitizers significantly reduce the number of germs on the skin, are fast acting and cause less skin irritation than with frequent soap and water handwashing. They do not work as well when there is visible dirt on the skin because they do not release and rinse away dirt as occurs with soap and water washing.

- Apply the product to the palm of one hand and rub the hands together, covering all surfaces of the hands and fingers, until hands are dry.
- For the highest level of effectiveness, look for products that contain at least 60% ethyl alcohol.

Long fingernails or artificial nails make hand hygiene difficult to achieve. For these persons extra attention to scrubbing underneath fingernails is required to remove dirt and germs. Health care or patient care workers are discouraged from having long fingernails, because they work with patients who are at high risk for infection and failure to assure proper hand hygiene could be dangerous.

Gloves can be a helpful and important supplement to good hygiene. Although gloves can protect the hands against contamination, they do not always prevent hand contamination. For this reason, gloves do not eliminate the need for hand hygiene. Hand hygiene should always occur before and after contact with patients.